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ART.

JOHN ROGERS.

WHEN the lives of the artists of America shall be written by some future Vasari, it will be seen that most of them labored under greater disadvantages than beset their brethren abroad, and that there was little or nothing in their ancestry and surroundings to account for their determination towards Art. A large number will be found to have come from the people—that is to say, from those to whom Art is as if it did not exist—farmers, tradesmen, and the like—and to have struggled the harder for that very reason. The growth of Art in Europe is explained by the art-galleries in its great capitals. We have no such galleries here to educate the taste of the many, and to awaken the sleeping powers of the few. As a rule, our artists have been made such by Nature and not by Art, and may say, with a difference, what Burns said of himself in the Preface to the Edinburgh edition of his Poems: "The poetic genius of my country found me, as the prophetic bard Elijah did Elisha, at the plough, and threw her inspiring mantle over me." From the plough, the anvil, the carpenter's bench, the machine-shop, the genius of American Art has summoned her children, especially the small band whom she hopes to see restore the declining art of sculpture. Palmer handled the plane and chisel; and Rogers learned and followed the trade of a machinist. Of the two, Rogers has been most influenced by the people from whom he sprung, and by the conditions of their life and his own; and is, therefore, in a certain sense, the most American of all our sculptors.

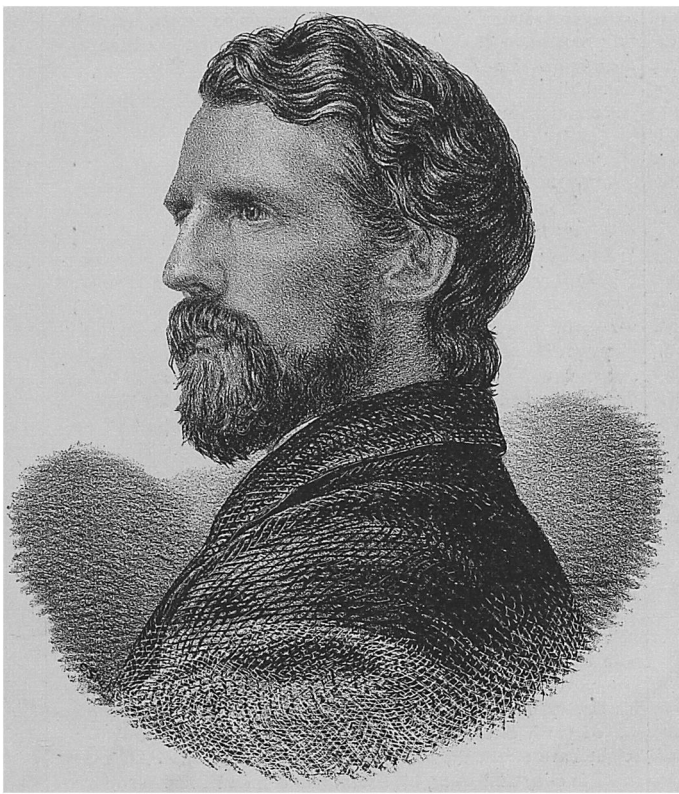
John Rogers was born in 1829, at Salem, Mass., a town made famous about one hundred and fifty years before by a lot of old women who flattered themselves that they were witches, but from which all the witchery had then departed, except what was brooding in the brain of young Nathaniel Hawthorne. The Rogers family had resided in the State for several generations, and were thoroughly identified with its character and its institutions. If any of John's ancestors were artists, the circumstance has not come down to us, though it is said that some members of his mother's family manifested artistic capacity, whatever that may mean. His father was a merchant, who gave his son as good an education as was then afforded by the common schools of New England. It included only the necessary branches, reading, writing and arithmetic, with a little grammar and geography. These were considered sufficient for the average youth of the period; at any rate they were all that were taught. If he happened to have tastes which might lead him into other than business pursuits, so much the worse for him. Rogers, for example, showed a decided talent for drawing at an early age, but he was not encouraged in it. He wanted to become an artist, but his parents shook their heads, and placed him in a dry goods store in Boston, where he was employed till his eighteenth year.

As that is the age at which New England boys have to decide what trade they will learn (if they are to earn their bread by manual labor), or have to submit to the decision of their parents or guardians in this respect, Rogers decided to leave the dry goods store, and join a corps of engineers on the Cochituate waterworks. Here he found an opportunity to exercise his talent for drawing, and embraced it eagerly, so much so that he overtasked and injured his eyes, and was obliged to give it up. He made a short trip to Spain to recruit his strength, and on his return entered a machine-shop at Manchester, N. H., where he remained seven years. What constituted a day's work, eight hours or ten hours, was not mooted then—the day's work being all that could be got out of the workman. In the case of Rogers and his fellow machinists at Manchester, it was fourteen hours, *i. e.*, from 5 A. M. to 7 P. M. It was a hard life that he led, but he bore it bravely, cheered by the prospect of one day becoming an artist. He had found his vocation. It was revealed to him just after his return from Spain, when he saw a young man in Boston modeling figures in clay. He watched his unknown master closely, and in a few minutes learned the mechanical part of his art. To get clay and to model himself was his next step, and a very important one it was. He had no time that he could call his own except the night, which he devoted to modeling, working by the light of a tallow-candle, suspended over his clay, until the lateness of the hour warned him that it was time to stop. "Sometimes he was so mastered by his conception of a new study, that when night came he could not sleep or even rest, although fatigued by a day's hard work, until he had put his idea into clay, and in a satisfactory manner. He found it extremely difficult to perform the arduous and irksome duties of his daily employment, and he tried to induce his relatives to assist him in his efforts to develop and educate his artistic faculty; but in this he was unsuccessful, and was obliged to work away at the machinery, suffering as much, perhaps, from his efforts conscientiously to serve two masters, as from long hours and little sleep." So passed the days and nights of the young machinist-sculptor.

In 1856, an offer was made him to take charge of a railroad machine-shop at Hannibal, Missouri, and he proceeded thither. Before two years had passed, there came what the financiers call "a business crisis;" there was a stoppage of work in the West, and he was obliged to return to the East. Finding nothing to do at his trade, he determined to devote himself to art, and that he might perfect himself therein, he resolved to go to Europe and see what the old masters had done. He visited Paris and Rome, and studied for awhile in the latter city, but without the success he had expected. The masterpieces of classic sculpture awoke no enthusiasm in him. He was not interested in them; and, doubtful of himself on that account, he returned to America thoroughly discouraged in his art. Work was still a necessity with him, so he sought employment, and found it in Chicago, in the office of the City Surveyor. His mind soon recovered its healthy tone, and in the course of a few months he modeled a group of figures for a ladies' fair in behalf of some public charity. This group, which he entitled "The Checker Players," attracted attention, and encouraged him to proceed in the walk of art which it opened to him, and for which he had been groping so long.

The subject of his second group, "The Town Pump," was happily chosen, and added to the reputation he had acquired by "The Checker Players." His third group, "The Slave Auction," struck a deeper chord, and one which was then vibrating fiercely through the land. Whether it was forced upon him by the political and moral condition of the time, or whether it was selected by him for art purposes alone, we have no means of knowing; but whatever its origin and *motif*, the work showed that the new sculptor was not a clever amateur playing at art, but an earnest man, with whom art was a serious thing. "The Slave Auction" occasioned the removal of Mr. Rogers to New York, where it was exhibited. The politics of the different art-critics had something to do with the judgments they pronounced upon it, but nothing to do with the judgment of the public, by whom its excellence was at once recognized. Mr. Rogers opened a studio in New York in 1859, and sent out his business card: "John Rogers, Artist, Designs and Executes Groups of Figures in Composition at his studio, 599 Broadway, room 28.—N. B. They can be packed for transportation."

Mr. Rogers now set to work and reproduced copies of "The Slave Auction," "The Checker Players," and "The Town Pump," to which was soon added "The Village Schoolmaster." Between 1860 and 1862 he modeled two groups of a different character, "The Fairy's Whisper," and "Air Castles." The last was a commission, the only one, by the way, that Mr. Rogers has ever accepted. The conception of these groups is more poetical, so to speak, than those which preceded them, but they lack the chief characteristics of the artist, whose forte is the realization of every-day subjects. The works of Mr. Rogers at this period, with the exceptions just mentioned, are the most faithful reflection of the spirit by which the North was animated that American Art has yet produced. Their inspiration was the war which was then raging, and to which all feelings were turned. They reminded us of our brave soldiers, but



John Rogers.

they did not remind us of the brave but misguided men with whom they were struggling. Patriotism was there, victory was there, but somehow hatred was absent. Art has nothing to do with hatreds, whatever it may have to do with battles, and it has nothing to do with horrors. Mr. Rogers felt this instinctively, and the favor with which his groups were received convinced him that he was right. He produced in succession a series of war-studies, all of which were graphic, most of which were suggestive, and none of which were painful. To name them is to recall them to the recollection of his admirers. They are "The Picket Guard," "The Camp Fire," "The Sharp Shooters," "The Union Refugees," and "The Country Post Office, or News from the War."

The popularity of these groups induced Mr. Rogers to finally descend the toilsome flight of steps that led to his attic room on Broadway, and to remove in 1862 to the corner of Twenty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue, where his studio now is. He was winning "golden opinions from all sorts of people," and, what was still better, was making a reasonable amount of the currency of the country. He was enough of a lion to be described by the New York correspondents of out-of-town journals, by one of whom the following portrait of him was drawn: "Nearly every morning, at about nine o'clock, there crosses Madison Square in this city, going towards Dodsworth's Studio Building, a young man of medium height, upright in his bearing, and quick in his movements. He possesses a pleasing face, with an observant cast of countenance, expressive of the active character of his mind; and a manner, which, although stamped with firmness and decision, is yet gentle and winning. He has a broad, high forehead, aquiline nose, thoughtful blue eyes, a finely-cut mouth and a well-moulded chin, hidden under a full beard. Few of those who pass him would judge him to possess that power which Johnson defines as constituting a poet; that quality without which judgment is cold, and knowledge inert; that energy which collects, combines, amplifies, and animates." The works executed by Mr. Rogers during the next three years were of the same general character as those we have mentioned, but of a wider scope, and, if possible, of greater interest. They reflect faithfully the different phases of the great struggle between the North and the South, each grasping and presenting some incident, or episode, or central

idea. The progress of the war may almost be traced in their titles—viz., "The Returned Volunteer," "Mail Day," "One More Shot," "The Home Guard," "The Wounded Scout," "The Bushwhacker," and "Taking the Oath and Drawing Rations." The later works of Mr. Rogers finish what may be called the art-history of the war, and present us with some of its results. In "The Council of War," for example—a group, consisting of the figures of Secretary Stanton, President Lincoln and General Grant—we realize the stern determination which brought the war to a close; and in "Uncle Ned's School" we see the desire, real or supposed, of the freedman for knowledge. Other results are embodied in "The Charity Patient" and "The School Examination." In "The Courtship in Sleepy Hollow," a still later work, Mr. Rogers says to us, or such of us as hear the silent language of Art:

"A long war disturbed your mind; ...
Here your perfect peace is signed."

We are at peace again—in the happy old world of romance and the good old days of marvel—the beautiful Place which Irving created as for us, "out of space, out of time," and which Jefferson brings to our doors whenever he melts us to tears in *Rip Van Winkle*.

The position which Mr. Rogers occupies among the sculptors of America will be settled by Posterity without much reference to contemporary opinions. It is as unique as that which Wilkie occupies among the painters of England, and to call him the Wilkie of Sculptors is to say that his Art is simple, manly, and dramatic, which is certainly true.

PRANG'S CHROMOS.

THE art of printing in colors is not a new one, though it can hardly be called an Art until within the last few years. It was attempted long ago, but without success, since the only color which the 'prentice hands of its baffled students succeeded in reproducing was that of ink, of some neutral tint, with the various lights and shadows required by the original drawing that it sought to imitate. Wood blocks were tried at first, then copper-plates, then both in conjunction, the last producing the best specimens of color-printing. How poor it really was, however, may be seen by comparing the "Baxter Oil Prints," which were so popular twenty years ago, with the Chromos of Mr. Prang. They were pretty at the first glance, but the more one looked at them the more unsatisfactory they grew. Their colors lacked depth and body; their gradation and blending of tints was imperfect; there was no harmony in them; in a word, they were dry, hard, and thin. The final verdict upon them was, either that the right method of color-printing had not been followed, or that the right material with which to print had not been chosen. The latter was the fact. It was suspected by Senefelder, who, as long ago as 1818, discussed the possibility of making fac-similes of old paintings by Lithography, of which he was the inventor; and the suspicion was deepened at a later period in the minds of others, who were engaged independently in experiments in color-printing in England, France and Germany. It would be difficult to name the actual inventor of Chromo-Lithography, which after all is not so much the result of the labors of one man, as the sum-total of the labors of many men, working with the same end in view. It belongs to the world, and is at its best in America. They admit in Europe that we have carried it to a higher degree of perfection than they have, and they declare that Mr. Prang is the man who has done it.

It is only seven or eight years since Mr. Prang published his first Chromos—two landscapes after Bricher, and a group of chickens after Tait—and to-day they are numbered by hundreds, and are known the world over. He did not claim that they were as good as the paintings of which they were fac-similes, though he might have done so in some instances; he claimed that they were good representations of them, and that they would create a love for art. We think he was right. We think his Chromos have educated taste in thousands who had none before they saw them, and who would probably have had none unless they had seen them. This is not the highest taste, of course; but we cannot all be Ruskins at the start, and many of us cannot hope to own original pictures at all. In the meantime let us get all the good we can out of Chromos.

The range of subjects embraced in Mr. Prang's collection is large, and the artists represented therein are among the best in this country. They cover the whole ground of art, from landscapes and marine views, to the painting of birds, flowers and fruit. The selections from each are such as are most characteristic of the artist, and of the themes in which he excels. Only James Hart, for instance, could have painted the six landscapes which he has contributed to this little gallery of American scenery; and from whom but Brown, Lambdin, and Eastman Johnson could we obtain the groups of children who claim their paternity? We are familiar with the work of these painters, and we know that the best of it is here. The fac-simile of Johnson's "Barefoot Boy" will stand the test of examination with the original. The same may be said of Brown's young people. It is in works of this nature that the chief strength of Chromo-Lithography lies. Its exceptional strength, if we may use the phrase, is shown in "The Reading Magdalen," of Correggio, which is the best example of pure and harmonious coloring in the whole collection. Given a thoroughly good picture, a thoroughly good copy can be predicted. This is not to say that the copyist is the equal of the artist, but it is to say that he is not the merely mechanical workman that some would have us believe. His work admits of as much individuality as the engravings of Strange, Bartolozzi, and Morghen—which, after all, are only copies! Mr. Prang has copied some pictures that we should not have selected for that honor, but we can see the reason. He had to feel his way, in order to succeed; in other words, he had to create the taste he was to educate. If his pupils were backward, the fault was theirs, not his. His Chromos are a creditable exhibit of the popular feeling for Art. It is not high, perhaps, but it is pure, embracing much that is lovely in Nature, and natural in emotion. His latest Chromo, "Reminiscences of an Old Man," after Durand, is an evidence of this. It is simple and pathetic, and characteristic of the artist, whose tender lights and pensive shadows are faithfully reproduced.